

ORAL STATEMENT
THE HONORABLE NICOLE R. NASON
BEFORE THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, HUD
AND RELATED AGENCIES
March 29, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the nation's traffic safety priorities, and NHTSA's budget request for fiscal year 2008.

NHTSA is requesting \$833 million for FY '08, a net increase of \$18 million over last year. I have a detailed written statement, which I request be included in the record. Because of time constraints, today I will speak to three areas of interest to the Subcommittee: NHTSA's work to encourage greater deployment of crash avoidance technologies, our renewed commitment to end impaired driving, and our recent proposal to responsibly raise fuel economy standards in a way that does not decrease safety.

First, I'm pleased to report that NHTSA will soon announce a final rule mandating electronic stability control, or ESC, on all passenger vehicles by 2011. Due to the hard work of our vehicle safety team at NHTSA, this rule will be finalized nearly two years ahead of its statutory deadline.

Electronic Stability Control is a revolutionary technology because it helps the driver avoid a crash altogether. This technology is especially effective in reducing rollovers, one of the most deadly types of crashes, particularly for SUVs, which ride high off the road. Each year three percent of traffic crashes involve rollover, but they account for about a third of all

occupant deaths. NHTSA estimates that ESC will save between 5,000 and 9,600 lives annually when fully deployed into the fleet. I believe ESC could prove to be the greatest vehicle safety innovation since the seat belt.

Crash avoidance technologies like ESC are just the beginning of what we hope is a new era in highway safety, where many crashes, and the pain and suffering from those crashes, are prevented outright.

Turning to impaired driving, last November I renewed NHTSA's commitment to end the scourge of drunk driving by becoming the Honorary Chair of the Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving. This new campaign has brought together law enforcement, policymakers, auto manufacturers, MADD and responsible distilled spirits companies to address this tragic problem. In 1982, 60% of the total traffic fatalities were alcohol-related; today, 39% are alcohol-related. Unfortunately, this trend has remained essentially flat for over a decade. I believe new gains can still be achieved through a combination of tougher laws, vigorous enforcement, and continuing our new national media campaign to remind motorists that if you are "over the limit, you are under arrest."

In addition, The Campaign to Eliminate Drunk Driving holds the promise to resume the dramatic reductions we saw in the 1980s, chiefly because of its embrace of wider deployment of alcohol-ignition interlocks. These devices, which are now installed on about 100,000 cars of DUI offenders, prevent the impaired motorist from driving in the first place. We believe current research will produce a new generation of interlocks that will be non-invasive and much more reliable. Large-scale deployment of this

technology, coupled with continued vigorous law enforcement, offers the very real prospect that drunk driving could one day be a thing of the past.

Finally, our budget requests an additional \$600,000 in anticipation of conducting a rulemaking to boost passenger car fuel economy standards responsibly. This proposal has many benefits over the current flawed system – such as spreading the regulatory burden among all manufacturers, maintaining consumer choice, and helping to ensure that every type of car – small, mid-size and large – becomes more fuel efficient. But most importantly, this proposal ends the trade-off between sacrificing safety for better fuel economy.

Our legislation ends the so-called “safety penalty” by encouraging automakers to boost fuel economy not by simply downsizing vehicles, but by adding fuel saving technologies. A 2002 National of Academy of Sciences study on fuel economy found that the current CAFE statute was responsible in part for an additional 1,300 to 2,600 traffic fatalities in 1993 because of the downsizing and downweighting of vehicles. If the Administration’s proposal is enacted by Congress, no longer will increasing passenger car fuel economy mean a decrease in safety.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I believe the Administration’s request is fiscally sound, responsible, and directs resources to areas that will produce the most benefits.

I look forward to working with you Mr. Chairman, Congressman Knollenberg, and all the members of the Subcommittee. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

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